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~~TOP SECRET SENSITIVE~~

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FROM: AMBASSADOR BUNKER, SAIGON 0665

TO: THE WHITE HOUSE, EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY HENRY A. KISSINGER

REF: A. WHS-1021

State Dept. review completed

B. J I

WHS-1023

1. I CAN WELL UNDERSTAND THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED IN YOUR 1021 OF MARCH 18. I AM SURE THEY MUST HAVE BEEN COMPOUNDED BY THE KIND OF BIASED, HALF-BAKED, TENDENTIOUS PRESS REPORTING COMING OUT OF HERE AND THE EFFECT IT MUST BE HAVING AT HOME. AS PRESIDENT THEIU SAID YESTERDAY, "A PLATOON LEADER CAN'T DESCRIBE THE WAR IN A WAY IN WHICH A GENERAL CAN" AND MUCH OF THE REPORTING HAS REPRESENTED THE VIEWS OF PLATOON LEADERS AND HELICOPTER PILOTS.; I YGI MAY BE CERTAIN THAT I DID NOT INTERPRET YOUR 1021 AS A CRITICISM OF ME OR OF OUR SIDE, BUT AS ONE EXPRESSING REAL AND UNDERSTANDABLE CONCERNS.

2. GENERAL ABRAMS HAS REPORTED THROUGH HIS CHANNELS TO ADMIRAL MOORER (SE-1078-32) ON THE TALK WHICH HE, GENERAL HAIG, AND I HAD WITH THIEU YESTERDAY. GENERAL HAIG ALSO HAS REPORTED TO YOU. I WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO GO OVER THE GROUND THEY HAVE COVERED, BUT WOULD SIMPLY LIKE TO ADD A FEW COMNJS. IT IS TRUE THAT PLANS FOR LAM SON 719 HAVE HAD TO BE CHANGED. AS THE OPERATION HAS DEVELOPED, IT HAS NOT MATCHED THE SCENARIO USED TO EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS. CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE NECESSARY BY WEATHER CONDITIONS; BY THE LAOTIAN TERRAIN, BY THE CONDITION OF ROUTE 9 WITHIN LAOS; BY THE BUILDUP OF ENEMY FORCESSOO AN EXTENT GREATER THAN ANTICIPATED; BY THE FACT THAT ARVN FORCES HAVE BEEN FIGHTING CONTINUALLY FOR 33 DAYS, HAVE TAKEN HEAVY CASUALTIES, AND ARE IN NEED OF ROTATION, REST AND REFITTING.

LI 3. IN OPERATIONS OF THIS KIND, TACTICS HAVE TO BE KEPT FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ADAPT TO CHANGING CONDITIONS, INCLUDING ENEMY TACTICS. THIEU, I THINK, HAS ACTED AND MOVED IN RESPONSE TO CONDITIONS AS THEY HCPJDEVELOPED DURING THE COURSE OF THE OPERATION. GENERAL ABRAMS AND I HAVE MADE A POINT OF SEEING HIM TOGETHER ONCE A WEEK TO GET HIS CURRENT THINKING AND ABE HAS REPORTED TO ADMIRAL MOORER THROUGH HIS CHANNELS.

OSD Review Completed

ARMY review completed.

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

4. WHILE THE OPERATION IS NOT EXTENDING FOR AS LONG A PERIOD AS WE HAD ORIGINALLY EXPECTED, MY OWN VIEW IS THAT IT HAS ACHIEVED MOST OF WHAT WE HAD HOPED FOR. ARVN HAS SUSTAINED HEAVY LOSSES, BUT ENEMY LOSSES HAVE BEEN FAR HEAVIER. OF TEN ENEMY REGIMENTS, SIX HAVE SUSTAINED HEAVY CASUALTIES; TEN OF HIS THIRTY MANEUVER BATTALIONS HAVE BEEN LOST TO HIM. HIS KIA OF NEARLY 11,000 INCLUDE 3,000 OF HIS REAR SERVICES. THE MOVEMENT OF SUPPLIES HAS BEEN DISRUPTED. I BELIEVE THAT THE COMBINATION OF LAM SON 719 AND TOAN THANG 01/71 WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR THE ENEMY TO CARRY OUT ANY MAJOR OPERATIONS DURING THE REMAINDER OF THE DRY SEASON AND WILL GREATLY BENEFIT OUR REDEPLOYMENT.

5. ADDITIONAL BENEFITS WILL ACCRUE IN SOUTH VIETNAM AS A RESULT OF LAM SON 719. IN OUR DISCUSSION YESTERDAY, THIEU STATED THAT THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM ARE ENCOURAGED AND PLEASED BY ITS RESULTS. THE PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN PRIDE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF ARVN AND SPONTANEOUS SUPPORT HAS COME FROM MANY SOURCES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THEY ARE AWARE THAT ARVN HAS SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES, BUT KNOW THAT ENEMY LOSSES HAVE BEEN FAR HEAVIER. THE FIGHTING HAS BEEN IN LAOS, NOT IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THIEU GIVES EVERY EVIDENCE OF FEELING THAT THE OPERATION HAS BEEN A POLITICAL AS WELL AS A MILITARY PLUS.

6. CLEARLY IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO MAKE A BETTER APPRAISAL OF THE OVERALL EFFECT OF LAM SON 719 SEVERAL MONTHS FROM NOW, BUT I THINK WE HAVE REASON TO BE ENCOURAGED BY THE RESULTS SO FAR ACHIEVED.

Y

TOP SECRET

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7. WARMEST REGARDS.

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